

***The Graves of ‘Three Thousand Soldiers’:***  
**A Study and Translation of Oda Makoto’s**  
***‘Sanzen gunpei’ no haka***

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Oda Makoto 小田実 (1932–2007) was one of contemporary Japan’s most unswerving social critics and novelists. He was born in Osaka and witnessed the fire-bombings at the end of the Pacific War. It was this unique experience of belonging to the cohort of people who came of age during the era of scorched earth (*yakeato jidai*) that would compel him to become one of Japan’s most eloquent postwar iconoclasts. He began his literary career at an unusually early stage of his life. At seventeen and still in second grade at high school, he composed the long novel *Memorandum of the Day After Tomorrow* (*Asatte no shuki*), which was praised by his acquaintance the novelist Nakamura Shinichirō and was published in 1951 by the enigmatic editor of Kawade shobō, Sakamoto Kazuki. This very early success triggered Oda’s literary career, which started in earnest after he returned to Japan from the United States where he had studied at Harvard University as a Fulbright scholar in 1959. Following his studies he travelled widely throughout Asia on his way back to Japan and wrote *I Will Look at Anything*, which became an instant bestseller after its publication in 1961. Oda’s writings were fuelled by constant overseas travel and the short story translated here is a result of his stay in West Berlin as a Cultural Exchange scholar from 1985 to 1987. It confronts many of the myths surrounding the wartime atrocities committed by Germany and Japan. One of the finest examples of cross-cultural novelistic discourse, it offers a unique insight into German–Japanese discourse formation. Oda’s unique sense of estrangement at the same time disturbs and liberates readers through

grotesque and eerie revelations that express the most traumatic moment in twentieth-century history.

In contemporary Japan Oda Makoto is respected as a prolific novelist, an engaging social critic and a controversial political activist who focused on the most controversial and difficult issues facing postwar Japan. He travelled extensively throughout America and East Asia and achieved instant notoriety through his seminal travel narrative *I Will Look at Anything* (Nan demo mite yarō),<sup>1</sup> which broke Japan's initial postwar isolationism and arguably triggered the re-institutionalisation of international tourism in the postwar paradigm of Japan's economic miracle. His political engagement during the anti-security treaty protests in the 1960s and 1970s and his anti-Vietnam stance produced such long narratives as *America* (1962)<sup>2</sup> and *Far Removed from Vietnam* (1991)<sup>3</sup> and made him one of the most recognisable faces of postwar Japan. Following a cultural exchange visit to Germany from 1975 to 1976, Oda published several seminal works that de-mythologised postwar Japanese history and the vestiges of its past, culminating in his re-imagining, in *Hiroshima* (1981), of the Hiroshima holocaust as an international event.<sup>4</sup> Following the Great Hanshin Earthquake on 17 January 1995, Oda once again focused his attention on contemporary society and its faulty dialogue with an imaginary past. Oda's most recent works include a BBC dramatisation of his story *The Breaking Jewel* (Gyokusai, 1999),<sup>5</sup>

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1. This is arguably Oda Makoto's most successful book. It has not been translated but is frequently cited as *I Will Look at Anything*. Published originally in 1961 by Kawade shobō shinsha it became the postwar generation's seminal work of travel literature, opening the country to the possibility of engaging directly with the West after the war. In 'Oda Makoto's "I Will Look at Anything"' 小田実の「何でも見てやろう」, *Kokubungaku kaishaku to kanshō* (July 1972), 222–3, Tsuge Teruhiko 柘植光彦 analyses Oda's narrative in terms of ushering in the 'shoestring-traveler' (*binbō ryokō*) boom of the early 1960s, which signified a fundamental attempt to explore the relationship between the US and Japan as well as the deracinated relationship between Asia and Japan.

2. Oda Makoto, *Amerika* アメリカ (Tokyo: Kawade shobōsha, 1962).

3. Oda Makoto, *Betonamu kara tooku hanarete* ベトナムから遠く離れて (Tokyo: Kodansha, 1991).

4. Oda Makoto, *Hiroshima* 広島 (Tokyo: Kodansha, 1981), trans. D. H. Whittaker, *The Bomb* (Tokyo: Kodansha International, 1990).

5. Broadcast on Saturday 6 August 2005, 18:33 BST *World Service* under the title *Gyokusai: The Breaking Jewel*; dramatised by Tina Pepler, directed by David Hitchison. This is Oda's most successful English translation of his

which deals with the mythology of sacrificial death in the Pacific Theatre during World War II.

Oda Makoto's short stories relate his personal experiences to historical events in a mixture of realism and fiction designed to address complex contemporary issues. Oda's life was an endless involvement with fringe issues. It is the engagement with the outsider and Oda's dialectic with it that moves the peripheral issues treated in Oda's narratives from the margin to the contemporary centre stage. Oda's short stories are never just inventions, they are always authentic and factual portrayals of the 'predicaments' of the underprivileged in the contemporary world. Oda's stories are also politically and philosophically egalitarian accounts that alert readers to forgotten histories in their own culture, which by their very nature turn out to be globally connected vignettes.

Oda's 'The Graves of "Three Thousand Soldiers"' ('Sanzen gunpei' no haka) was first published in *Gunzō* and was later republished by Kōansha in the short-story anthology *Stepping on 'Father'* ('Aboji' o fumu, 1998).<sup>6</sup> Oda's expertise is in the all-encompassing, holistic long narrative (*zentai shōsetsu*), but this methodology of attempting to write an all-embracing story is also characteristic of his short-story style, irrespective of the confines of a much restricted narrative space. In the epilogue to his short-story anthology *Stepping on 'Father'* Oda remarks:

Fundamentally my long narratives are what could be called *chōhen zentai shōsetsu* [long holistic novels] and if there is one thing we can nominate as characteristic of my short stories then it is that they are essentially also written in the style of the 'holistic novel'.<sup>7</sup>

In 'The Graves of "Three Thousand Soldiers"', Oda adopts the Korean myth of the angry spirits of 'Three Thousand Soldiers' and the

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work about the ritualistic suicide of the Japanese military in the Pacific War. Oda Makoto, *Gyokusai* 玉碎 (Tokyo: Shinchōsha, 1999), trans. Donald Keene, *The Breaking Jewel* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003).

6. See Roman Rosenbaum, 'A Translation of "Aboji" wo fumu', *Journal of the Oriental Society of Australia* 36–37 (2004–05), 86–103. Originally published in *Gunzō* (October 1997), republished in Oda Makoto, *'Aboji' wo fumu* 「アボジ」を踏む (Tokyo: Kodansha, 1998).

7. Oda Makoto, 'The Graves of "Three Thousand Soldiers"' 「三千軍兵」の墓, in *Stepping on 'Father'* 「アボジ」を踏む (Tokyo: Kodansha, 1998), p. 290.

central metaphor of the grave to connect some of the most catastrophic human failures of the twentieth century. Oda's story is comprised of three historical epochs. The story of the Buchenwald concentration camp and the Holocaust survivor Z, whose visit to Japan for cultural reconciliation ends in his dying with no-one to care for his grave (*muen botoke*).<sup>8</sup> This 'nameless death' becomes the central metaphor of the proverbial three thousand soldiers (*sanzen gunpei*), who died an 'anonymous death'. The initial Z is very much a personification of the nameless death that Oda attempts to encapsulate in this part of the story. Z remains nameless throughout; he is a final reminder and appears as a symbol for the Holocaust's 'final solution'. Oda cleverly interconnects the Japanese–German experience of nameless deaths through various cross-cultural mythologies. There is, for example, the controversial Germanic concept of the 'biological solution', the sinister notion that if one waits long enough the issue will go away and eventually 'die out' with its last survivor. In contemporary Germany it is used derogatorily in reference to the government's negligence in paying reparation or compensation to the victims of the Holocaust. The term biological solution is extremely controversial and suggests former Nazi practices of forced sterilisation and the notorious final solution.

Oda uses the central Korean metaphor of the three thousand soldiers to unite the restless souls of the war through the mythology of shamanistic ancestral worship. His metaphor suggests that if nameless deaths are not appeased through appropriate cultural practices the dead will continue to haunt the living. Oda's interlacing of mythologies suggests through techniques of estrangement that if we do not reconcile and accept accountability for our former actions then they will continue to haunt us in the contemporary world. He suggests implicitly that cultural practices based on bygone mythologies—such as the ever-present controversy over Yasukuni Jinja<sup>9</sup> visits, the theory

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8. *Muen botoke* is a mythological term for the belief that the souls of people who have died an unnatural death, like by suicide, in accidents or in wars, become lost and continue to wander this world. They are feared for their potential to harm the living.

9. See, for example, John Nelson, 'Social Memory as Ritual Practice: Commemorating Spirits of the Military Dead at Yasukuni Shinto Shrine', *Journal of Asian Studies* 62, No. 2 (May 2003), 443–67. See also Cyril Powles, 'Yasukuni Jinja Hōan: Religion and Politics in Contemporary Japan',

of Japanese uniqueness (*Nihonjinron*)<sup>10</sup> and the revival of the ideology of the emperor system (*tennōsei*)—may isolate Japan from the rest of the world. The first section of this holistic short story ends with the Korean female shaman praying for the souls of the three thousand soldiers in order to keep them at ease.

The second part of the short story introduces the character T who, unlike Z, is not nameless: the T stands for Tomio. T is Oda's familiar metaphor of the interstitial citizen or person whose liminal ethnicity forces them to live in the theoretical space between nations, belonging to neither one nor the other and sometimes being rejected by both. Oda had used the metaphor of Tomio already in his long novel *Hiroshima*, where he depicted him as a second-generation American Japanese, who decides to return to Japan after growing up in the United States (*kibei nisei*). In "The Graves of "Three Thousand Soldiers"", Tomio reappears as a disenfranchised figure of fragmentation. He is a native of Micronesia, from the Marshall Islands in the Central Pacific Ocean, which was initially under the jurisdiction of Japan but became a territory of the United States after the war. Even though his name is Japanese he does not speak the language and talks with Oda in English. The story of T dramatically shifts the focus of the short story from the Holocaust in Europe to the devastating war in the Pacific and its aftermath of nuclear devastation. Through Tomio, Oda retells the story of Japan's involvement in the neglected postwar Pacific holocaust. Tomio was born on Kwajalein Atoll, one of the world's largest coral atolls, which is part of the Republic of the Marshall Islands. From here on, Oda engages readers with the story of the Pacific Proving Ground, the name given to the nuclear tests carried out by the United States in the Pacific between 1946 and 1962. Kwajalein, which was also the site of a suicide battle, had been used for military purposes since 1944, when the US captured the atoll from

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*Pacific Affairs* 49, No. 3 (1976), 491–505. The Yasukuni shrine in Tokyo today is a controversial symbol of the hero/perpetrator dichotomy that divides the local/international perception of the Greater East Asian Conflict.

10. For a Japanese discussion of the *Nihonjinron* ideology see, for example, Funabiki Takeo 船曳建夫, *Nihonjinron* 日本人論 (Theory of Japanese uniqueness) (Tokyo: Nippon hōsō shuppan kyōkai, 2003). For an English analysis of this discursive formation see, for example, Yoshino Kosaku, *Cultural Nationalism in Contemporary Japan: A Sociological Enquiry* (New York: Routledge, 1992), as well as Peter N. Dale, *The Myth of Japanese Uniqueness* (London: Routledge, Nissan Institute for Japanese Studies, 1990).

the Japanese in the battle of Kwajalein fought from 31 January 1944 to 3 February 1944. In postwar Japan the US military built the Kwajalein missile range on the island and forced all of the inhabitants to move to nearby Ebeye Island, which has thus become one of the most densely populated areas in the world or, in Oda's words, a 'Pacific slum'. Oda mentions many more islands in the short story, notably Enewetak Atoll in the Marshall Islands, which was the site of yet another a suicide battle. Once a Spanish colony, Enewetak was not known to other Europeans until visited in 1794 by the British merchant vessel *Walpole*, when it was called 'Brown's Range', a name still in use in Japanese as 'Brown Atoll'. It was visited by only a dozen or so ships before Germany colonised the Marshall Islands in 1885. Along with the rest of the Marshalls, Enewetak was captured by Japan in 1914 and mandated to them by the League of Nations in 1920. After the Second World War, the residents were evacuated, often involuntarily, and, as already mentioned, the atoll was used for nuclear testing as part of the US Pacific Proving Ground. This went on from 1948 to 1962, when atmospheric testing ended. The first hydrogen-bomb test, Ivy Mike, was conducted in 1952 at Enewetak. The people began returning in the 1970s, and on 15 May 1977 the US government began removing contaminated soil and other material from the atoll, not declaring it safe for habitation until 1980.

T relates the story of the Japanese corpses buried in pits on the island of Kwajalein and how, because of the thermonuclear experiments carried out on Bikini Atoll, the whole island was covered with nuclear fallout or what Oda described as 'ashes of death' (*shi no hai*).<sup>11</sup> Known as Castle Bravo, the first US dry-fuel thermonuclear device was detonated on 1 March 1954 by the United States, as the initial test of Operation Castle, which was a longer series of tests of various devices. Radioactive fallout spread onto nearby Rongelap and Rongerik atolls, which are located in Micronesia under the jurisdiction of the Marshall Islands and had to be evacuated. The test was one thousand times more powerful than the atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki during World War II, and led to the worst radiological accident ever caused by the United States. Oda also incorporates the Rongelap Atoll incident into the tapestry of his short

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11. This is the metaphoric Japanese term denoting radioactive fallout (*hōshasei kōkabutsu*).

story. After this 1954 experiment, winds carrying radioactive fallout dropped inches of contaminated ash on the residents of Rongelap. They were relocated to Kwajalein for medical treatment within three days, but for many help came too late. The islanders were allowed to return in February of 1957, until a second evacuation, aided by Greenpeace, was necessary in 1985. The islanders resettled on Mejjatto Island on Kwajalein Atoll. In September 1996, the US Department of the Interior signed a \$45 million resettlement agreement with the islanders. Many of the children conceived by the native people of the Marshall Islands have since suffered birth defects and have received some compensation from the Federal government.<sup>12</sup> Oda also incorporates one of the most famous cases of postwar atomic disasters. The Japanese tuna fishing boat *Daigo fukuryū maru* (Lucky Dragon No. 5)<sup>13</sup> was also exposed to the nuclear fallout from the Castle Bravo explosion on Bikini Atoll. Kuboyama Aikichi, the boat's chief radioman, was one of twenty-three fishermen aboard who became contaminated and subsequently died six months later, on 23 September 1954, from acute radiation sickness. By the end of 2004, twelve crew members had died and the tragedy of the *Daigo fukuryū maru* triggered a fierce anti-nuclear movement in Japan because of the fear that the contaminated fish may have been sold in the markets. The US government feared this would lead to an anti-American movement, and attempted to quickly negotiate a settlement with the Japanese government (led at the time by Prime Minister Yoshida Shigeru, who was considered to be pro-US). The US government provided \$200,000 for the victims and the Japanese government acknowledged it would not pursue further reparation from the US government.<sup>14</sup>

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12. See, for example, Geoffrey M. White and Lamont Lindstrom, *The Pacific Theater: Island Representation of World War II* (University of Hawaii, 1989), pp. 73–96.

13. See, for example, Dai go fukuryūmaru heiwa kyōkai 第五福龍丸平和協会 (Lucky Dragon No. 5 Peace Association) and the virtual representation of the incident. Online at: <[http://www.pcf.city.hiroshima.jp/virtual/VirtualMuseum\\_e/exhibit\\_e/exh0503\\_e/exh05031\\_e.html](http://www.pcf.city.hiroshima.jp/virtual/VirtualMuseum_e/exhibit_e/exh0503_e/exh05031_e.html)> (accessed 10 November 2009).

14. For a detailed account of the incidents see, for example, Ōishi Matashichi 大石 又七, *Shi no hai wo seotte: watashi no jinsei wo kaeta daigo fukuryūmaru* 死の灰を背負って—私の人生を変えた第五福龍丸 (Carrying the ashes of death: The *Lucky Dragon No. 5* that changed my life) (Tokyo: Shinchōsha, 1991).

Continuing his metaphor of the grave as a linking strategy, Oda relates that T's restaurant on Kwajalein is built on top of the corpses of nameless Japanese soldiers who are buried beneath layers of ashes of death.

The third part of the short story focuses on the Great Hanshin Earthquake, also known as the Kobe Earthquake since its epicentre on Awaji Island was close to the city of Kobe, with a population of 1.5 million. Known in Japan as the *Hanshin-Awaji-daishinsai*, it measured 7.2 on the Richter scale. It occurred on 17 January 1995 at 5:46 in the morning and lasted for approximately twenty seconds. Over 6,000 people lost their lives and, as Oda points out, they were mainly from the underprivileged classes, including migrant workers, resident Koreans and Chinese labourers in Kobe. It was the worst earthquake in Japan since the Great Kanto Earthquake of 1 September 1923, which, according to Thomas Havens,<sup>15</sup> claimed 73,000 lives, but Oda de-familiarises the event and compares it evocatively with the fire-bombing of Osaka City in World War II. Oda's comparison of the natural disaster of an earthquake with the human disaster of war is controversial, to say the least. Kobe City was no stranger to calamity, as it was also firebombed repeatedly in the final stages of the Pacific War. For example, the city was firebombed by 331 American B-29 bombers on 17 March 1945 and on 5 June the same year it was bombed again, with incendiaries dropped from 473 bombers.<sup>16</sup> Kobe

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15. Thomas R. H. Havens, *Valley of Darkness: The Japanese People in World War II* (New York: Norton, 1978), p. 181.

16. For the grotesque official explanation of the fire-bombing campaigns against Japanese targets, see Chuck Anesi, 'United States Strategic Bombing Survey: Summary Report (Pacific War)', Washington, D.C., July 1, 1946. Online at: <<http://www.anesi.com/ussbs01.htm>> (accessed 10 November 2009), pp. 17–18. For example: 'On 9 March 1945, a basic revision in the method of B-29 attack was instituted. It was decided to bomb the four principal Japanese cities at night from altitudes averaging 7,000 feet. Japanese weakness in night fighters and anti-aircraft made this program feasible. Incendiaries were used instead of high-explosive bombs and the lower altitude permitted a substantial increase in bomb load per plane. One thousand six hundred and sixty-seven tons of bombs were dropped on Tokyo in the first attack. The chosen areas were saturated. Fifteen square miles of Tokyo's most densely populated area were burned to the ground. The weight and intensity of this attack caught the Japanese by surprise. No subsequent urban area attack was equally destructive. Two days later, an attack of similar magnitude on Nagoya destroyed two square miles. In a period of ten days starting 9 March, a total of 1,595 sorties delivered 9,373 tons of bombs

was also originally the target for the Tall Boy plutonium atomic weapon dropped by the USAAF in August 1945. However, due to adverse weather conditions the raid was diverted to Nagasaki. The imagery of the fire-bombings remains traumatic and emblematic in Oda's literature and he struggled to create meaning out of their significance. He wrote in 1966:

In the afternoon of 14 August 1945, thousands of people died during a protracted and intensive aerial bombardment of an arsenal in Osaka. I was a witness to the tragedy. I saw dozens of corpses—loyal subjects literally consumed by service to a government which had already decided to accept the Potsdam Declaration's demand for unconditional surrender. The only reason these people died was because they happened to have been in the arsenal or its environs at the time of the air raid. After what seemed an eternity of terror and anguish, we who were fortunate enough to survive emerged from our shelters. We found the corpses and the leaflets American bombers had dropped over the destruction. The leaflets proclaimed in Japanese, 'Your Government has surrendered. The war is over!'<sup>17</sup>

Even today vestiges of these atrocities provide powerful metaphoric emblems in Oda's literature. In 'The Graves of "Three Thousand Soldiers"', Oda de-familiarises the Great Hanshin Earthquake and its accompanying mythos of bureaucracy and governmental inadequacies through analogies to the pointless fire-bombings carried out at the end of World War II. Oda's notion of 'meaningless death' is retold through the Korean myth of the three thousand soldiers whose unjust death may bring misfortune to the living.

Yet, there is another reason why Oda feels strongly about the Great Hanshin Earthquake. He has written several other stories about it, including the full-length novel *Deep Sound*,<sup>18</sup> and the above-

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against Tokyo, Nagoya, Osaka, and Kobe destroying thirty-one square miles of those cities at a cost of twenty-two airplanes. The generally destructive effect of incendiary attacks against Japanese cities had been demonstrated.' Also online at: <<http://www.anesi.com/ussbs01.htm>> (accessed 10 November 2009).

17. Oda Makoto, 'The Meaning of "Meaningless Death"', *Journal of Social and Political Ideas in Japan* 4 (August 1966), 75. Originally published as "'Nanshi" no shisō' 「難死」の思想, *Tenbō* 展望 (January 1965). Republished in Oda Makoto, *Sengo o hiraku shisō* 戦後を拓く思想 (Thought that opens the postwar) (Tokyo: Kodansha 1965).

18. Oda Makoto, *Fukai oto* 深い音 (Deep sound) (Tokyo: Shinchōsha, 2002).

mentioned short story ‘Stepping on “Father”’, which relates the story of the death of his Korean father-in-law amid the mayhem of the earthquake. In ‘The Graves of “Three Thousand Soldiers”’ Oda accentuates the meaning of ‘obscure deaths’ through his metaphor of ‘graves of rubble’ and makeshift ‘garden-stone graves’. Once again, through reworking forgotten history and abandoned mythologies Oda himself takes on the role of the literary shaman, exorcising and appeasing lost spirits in today’s pantheistic Japan.

### **De-familiarising Postwar Mythologies: Godzilla, Gyokusai and Shamans and Their Influence on Popular Culture**

Oda’s short stories are rife with mythological references and ‘The Graves of “Three Thousand Soldiers”’ is no exception. After the experiences of Hiroshima and Nagasaki ushered in the atomic age and as a direct result Japan renounced war forever, it seemed only natural that Japan would join the global postwar anti-nuclear movement. When the *Daigo fukuryū maru* encountered the fallout from the US Castle Bravo nuclear test on Bikini Atoll, near the Marshall Islands on 1 March 1954, and Kuboyama Aikichi died after suffering acute radiation sickness, its ramifications rekindled a postwar nuclear angst that radically changed the popular and scientific culture in Japan. It all began five years after the accident, when the Japanese film director Shindō Kaneto made a film entitled *Daigo fukuryū maru*. The actor Uno Jūkichi played Kuboyama Aikichi and that’s how this incident of radiation contamination became part of folkloric belief. But more than anything else it was Godzilla (*Gojira*), a giant, amphibious, dinosaur-like Japanese monster (*kaijū*) that first appeared in the eponymous 1954 Japanese film, that changed the cultural representation of cinematography. Godzilla was produced by director Tsuburaya Eiji and the Tōhō Film Company. Since the 1954 Bravo nuclear test gave impetus to the image of nuclear deformation and *hibakusha*, the Tōhō Film Company has produced twenty-eight Godzilla films, which tell of a monster metamorphosed by radiation seeking revenge from modern civilisation. Godzilla as animistic *hibakusha* is an allegory for the effects of the nuclear holocausts as well as their unintended consequences on our environment. Although much of Godzilla’s allegorical significance as an anti-war symbol has been lost in the transition to contemporary pop culture, the nuclear breath at least

remains as a visual vestige of the creature's kinship to nuclear testing in the Pacific. In another historical parallel, Godzilla reflects the relationship between Japan and the United States as it transforms from an invincible enemy who causes enormous destruction into an ally and defender in times of peril.

Oda's short stories as well as his long narratives arise out of the legacy and concerns of the *yakeato* psychology, which also gave birth to Godzilla as a postwar avatar of this generation. Born in Osaka in 1932, Oda came of age during the 'era of scorched earth' (*yakeato jidai*), which began with the systematic fire-bombings of all major Japanese cities, culminated in the dropping of the atomic bombs and concluded in the black-market period following Japan's unconditional surrender on 15 August 1945. It is a defining feature of those who belonged to 'the generation of people who came of age during the era of scorched earth' (*yakeato sedai*) that they were forced to witness the ideological transformation from the inter-war mythology of 'honourable death for the sake of the emperor and the nation' (*gyokusai*) and its postwar de-mythologised incarnation of what Oda has termed meaningless death (*nanshi*). Oda explains this in 'The Ideology of Meaningless Death' (Nanshi no shisō):

For me death is not something that you read in the paper or see in movies. It is something that I have seen countless times with my own eyes and it definitely was nothing splendid and beautiful like, for example, the deaths of members of the Special Attack Forces, which are referred to as 'heroic deaths'. What's more, the deaths I saw were not significant within an 'official context' like the deaths of the Special Attack Forces. What I saw was meaningless death. They did not serve any purpose for this 'public context'. In other words, they were nothing but a bunch of worthless deaths of people being burned to cinders while running about trying to escape dying.<sup>19</sup>

Oda's notion of meaningless death emerging from the fire-bombed ruins at the end of World War II is reiterated in 'The Graves of "Three Thousand Soldiers"' through the potent symbolic linkage to nameless deaths emerging in the aftermath of the Great Hanshin Earthquake of 1995. It is this principle emerging from the heritage of the *yakeato* generation's traumatised psyche that also plays a pivotal role in this short story about the graves of three thousand soldiers.

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19. Oda Makoto, *Sengo o hiraku shisō*, p. 11.

Oda's central metaphor of the unnamed graves stands in stark contrast to the glorified sacrificial death known as *gyokusai*. Denoting 'total sacrifice', the term *gyokusai* was first used on 31 May 1943 when approximately 2,600 soldiers of the Imperial Japanese Army were annihilated on one of the westernmost of the American Aleutian Islands, called Attu (Atsuto) Island.<sup>20</sup> Having seized Attu on 7 June 1942, some 2,500 troops reportedly fought to the last man before 12,000 American troops retook the island on 30 May 1943.<sup>21</sup> The term *gyokusai* was created specifically for the Pacific War by Japanese Imperial Headquarters (*daihon'ei*), the highest institution of command established during World War II, to suggest the imagery of a 'smashed jewel'. Together with the synonymous 'to fall like flowers' (*sange*), according to Dower<sup>22</sup> *gyokusai* was a term of glorification intended to minimise the psychological impact on Japanese citizens of what amounted to a total annihilation (*zenmetsu*). Throughout the story, *gyokusai* has been translated<sup>23</sup> according to the context in various ways, such as 'committed *gyokusai*', 'died in battle rather than surrender' and 'to choose an honourable death rather than surrender'. Whether it is through the grief of the survivors or the realisation of the futility of these actions with the benefit of historical hindsight, Oda works hard to de-familiarise wartime glory in order to show us the contemporary remnants and lingering trauma lest we forget.

Oda's revisions of forgotten postwar mythologies culminate in his adoption of Korean folklore. The unembroidered translation of the title as 'three thousand soldiers' rather than 'nameless soldiers' is based on a Korean shamanistic myth that represents, in Oda's words, a

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20. See, for example, Dan Van der Vat, *The PACIFIC campaign: World War II, the U.S.–Japanese Naval War, 1941–1945* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1991).

21. For an eyewitness description of *gyokusai* and its connotation of meaningless death, on Attu see, for example, Donald Keene's foreword in *The Breaking Jewel*, pp. vii–viii.

22. John Dower, *War Without Mercy: Race and Power in the Pacific War* (London: Faber and Faber, 1986), pp. 231–2, 352.

23. The *Kodansha Encyclopedia of Japan* (Tokyo: Kodansha, 1983) translates *gyokusai* simply as 'total sacrifice'. Dower, *War Without Mercy*, p. 232, translates the term as 'choosing to die heroically in battle rather than surrender, or, more simply, choosing death over dishonor'. Donald Keene, *The Breaking Jewel*, p. vii, translates the phrase literally, as 'the breaking jewel'.

generic term for those who met all kinds of unfortunate deaths. Oda explains that in Korean ancestral beliefs it is the *mudang* who is put in charge of exorcising and appeasing the spirits of those souls who died an untoward death.<sup>24</sup> *Mudang* is the contemporary term for a Korean shaman, a role most frequently performed by women. The equivalent Japanese terms are *miko* for a medium with shamanistic sensibilities and *fujitsu* for shamanism. The particular rite discussed by Oda in this short story is similar to the Korean practice of *ssitgim-gut* and is used to cleanse the spirit of a deceased person. Since ancient times there has been a Korean belief that when somebody dies their body cannot enter the world of the dead because of the impurity of their spirit. The *ssitgim-gut* or ‘cleansing exorcism’ washes away this impurity.<sup>25</sup> Oda’s adoption of this ritualistic mythology is designed to pay respect to the large number of unnamed Korean, Chinese and native labourers who were expatriated and forced to fight alongside the Japanese military. Their names and origins are largely unknown and their deaths, forgotten, have never been eulogised. The shamanistic myth of the nameless soldiers is Oda’s ode to the anonymous deaths of innumerable unknown civilians, labourers and indigenous people who died as unwilling soldiers in the Pacific War.

Oda also adopts references to folkloric beliefs in the guise of popular songs to alert readers how popular folk ethnologies cradle ideological assumptions. For example, he mentions the song *Umi yukaba*, one of the most sacred national martial hymns of the Imperial Japanese Navy during World War II. Its measured mournful pathos and lyrics were adopted from a poem composed by Ōtomo no Yakamochi (c. 718–785) in 749 CE,<sup>26</sup> which originally appeared in the Man’yōshū anthology. Similarly to the cultural myth inherent in *gyokusai*, the song took on special meaning and was adopted to farewell soldiers on suicide missions.<sup>27</sup> In addition, Oda’s allusion to

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24. Jung Young Lee, *Korean Shamanistic Rituals* (The Hague: Mouton 1981), pp. 2–13.

25. See, for example, Kim Su-nam, *Gut, Korean Shamanic Ritual: Songs Calling Spirits*, trans. Kim Dong-kyu and Franklin Rausch (Gyeonggi-do: Youlhwadang, 2005), pp. 78–9, 234, 282.

26. Ōtomo no Yakamochi 大伴家持 was one of the compilers of the first imperial poetry anthology, known as the Man’yōshū: <[http://www.asahi-net.or.jp/~sg2h-ymst/yakauta\\_h.html](http://www.asahi-net.or.jp/~sg2h-ymst/yakauta_h.html)> (accessed 10 November 2009).

27. Inoguchi Rikihei and Nakajima Tadashi, *The Divine Wind: Japan’s Kamikaze Force in World War II* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1978), p. 61.

the popular children's song of the Peach Boy (*Momotarō-san no uta*),<sup>28</sup> as sung by the non-Japanese Tomio, highlights his ambiguous role as a figure caught between competing mythologies, namely that of the Japanese occupational legacy and his upbringing under the destructive influence of the American occupation. The purpose of Oda's retelling of old stories in a new and contemporary light is to demythologise the glorification of nationalism entrenched in the heroic myth of *gyokusai* and reveal its transformation into the meaningless death of nameless soldiers in the postwar paradigm.

Here follows my translation of Oda Makoto's short story 'The Graves of "Three Thousand Soldiers"':

#### **The Graves of 'Three Thousand Soldiers'**

I have lived a relatively long life and this year I am sixty-five. I have also come across a variety of people's deaths, starting from the charred bodies that lay about in the ruins of the fire. However, what I am about to write about here is not the death of people but rather the graves that relate to people's deaths.

I have come across a variety of graves. There were graves of people I had connections to and there were those of strangers. I would like to write about a few of them. There is also the feeling that I am now driven by necessity to leave a record behind about them.

Z's was a grave of weeds. There is no other way to put it. The grave was a short single lot about three metres deep and five metres wide where lawn grew. It was a section in a large cemetery within the city limits of Berlin and because the graves around it had the usual gravestones erected, it appeared at first glance to be a preparation site where a grave was about to be constructed. But this was a grave and not just his grave alone. The bones of as many as two hundred corpses stored in their own small bone jars, including his, were buried under the plot of grass. There was nothing marking the site as such—neither cross nor gravestone. I might have called it a lawn grave but the reality was that the clearing of lawn, which was not maintained very well, could indeed only be referred to as a weedy grave.

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28. For a detailed analysis of the Momotarō myth as parable reflecting Japan's relationship with its imperialist Western foes, see Dower, *War Without Mercy*, pp. 251–7.

Here and there fallen leaves were scattered. I crouched down and put down the single rose that my friend had bought at the flower shop at the entrance to the cemetery. I thought he would buy a large bouquet but it was a single pale red rose. My friend said that this was more suitable for the weedy grave and I agreed. If the rose had been deep red, it would probably have shone more vividly in the plot of grass but the pale red rose sank modestly into the grass and did not stand out.

After I put down the rose, I stood for a while in silence in front of the weedy grave. My head was bowed naturally but it was probably not because I was praying. I was thinking. Saying this is more appropriate to my attitude as well as my feelings at the time. It was autumn in October—or more precisely autumn in October of 1992—and at that time two months had passed since Z died. It had been a while since I had come to Berlin from Japan and I first heard of his death after I arrived. I hurried to the cemetery with my friend and only then discovered that his place of rest was the aforementioned weedy grave.

The autumn of Berlin's continental climate in October was in Japanese terms akin to the cold in mid-winter but completely dry. Amid this completely dry frostiness I stood in front of the weedy grave.

In Japanese terms the weedy grave should be called a tomb for 'people who died leaving no one to attend their graves'. Whether they had died in the street or something like that, this was certainly where people were buried whose name and origin were unknown. This was the case for the greater part of the two hundred people. But among them were also people like Z, whose name and origin were known but who had chosen to be put into the weedy grave.

This may remind some people of Mori Ōgai. When Ōgai was facing death, he wanted to die as 'Mori Rintarō from Iwami'<sup>29</sup> rather than as the very famous writer Mori Ogai who also had received a great many court ranks and honours as a military surgeon-general. It seems that there are occasionally people of importance or fame who desire such a nameless death but Z was neither important nor famous. He was the nameless person on the street and he lived and died as the nameless

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29. Iwami 石見 was formerly a province of Japan and was located in the western part of what is now Shimane prefecture.

person on the street. He worked for a broadcasting station but he was already retired when I met him and he wasn't anybody important.

Yet he was someone who had seen an incredible number of deaths. He saw deaths and the dead. And to add another essential fact he had seen the death of an incredible number of nameless dead. Far from court ranks and honours, innumerable people who had everything that expresses attributes of their humanity, such as their name and origin, stripped of them, died. Actually, they were killed. And Z did not look upon this as the deaths of strangers unrelated to him. He saw it as something that could certainly happen to him tomorrow or in the future. Z had been interned in a concentration camp of Nazi Germany.

The concentration camp he went to was in Buchenwald on the outskirts of Weimar, well known as the city of Goethe and Schiller, the foundation of the Weimar Constitution, which is a model for democracy, and the suburb of Weimar, which was the capital of the Weimar Republic,<sup>30</sup> as well as the concentration camp. The Buchenwald concentration camp was not just an extermination camp with the purpose of killing; yet 56,000 people died there. Among these 56,000 were countless ones who were simply just killed (these included the victims of a great many medical experiments which were carried out there) but there were also a great number of deaths from very poor living conditions as well as harsh labour. Using the language of Nazi Germany at the time, the inmates, who were forced to heavy labour without proper food, died naturally through a 'biological solution' even though they were 'exterminated through forced labour'. (This term is endowed with special meaning and exists in contemporary German as a technical term. Recently, German people who saw the areas affected by the Great Hanshin earthquake, where death through starvation as well as 'solitary death'<sup>31</sup> and

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30. The period of German history from 1919 to 1933 is known as the Weimar Republic. It is named after the city of Weimar, where a national assembly convened to produce a new constitution after the German monarchy and German empire were abolished following the nation's defeat in World War I.

31. The Japanese word for solitary death is *kodokushi* 孤独死 and it was very common in devastated Kobe after the earthquake. Shiozaki Yoshimitsu defines solitary death as 'where one dies completely alone without being taken care of or accompanied by anybody. One's body is often found several days after, in some cases even over a month after one's death.' Death in Japan is highly ritualised and managed as a collective in spirit similar, for example,

‘related deaths’ appeared one after the other, commented that perhaps government officials and politicians entertained a ‘biological solution’.) Inmates had no names. Instead of a name they were branded with and called by a number. They lived and died by that number in the concentration camp. In Z’s case that number was BU-I-999.

The reason why Z had to go there was simple: because his mother was a Jew. His father was German and appeared to have been a renowned violinist but his father and mother were forced to divorce. As a result, his mother and younger sister were sent from Berlin, where they had lived, to a concentration camp in Czechoslovakia and he and his younger brother were sent to Buchenwald. This happened in 1944 and he was sixteen at the time.

In April 1945 the American military came, but in the Buchenwald concentration camp the inmates formed a resistance movement and managed to free themselves. Z was a member of this movement.

Up to this point, if we say that he had been sent to a concentration camp and that his mother was Jewish—irrespective of how unjust this may be—I would have been able to imagine the story sufficiently with the benefit of historical hindsight. However, Z’s story thereafter is beyond ordinary imagination and exemplifies how cruel his fate was.

In fact Z was interned twice in the Buchenwald concentration camp. The first time for one year and the second time for a period of four years. In the postwar period after the American military handed over its position as occupying forces in that area to the former Soviet military and withdrew, the former Soviet military made Buchenwald their own concentration camp and interned their own prisoners there. The purpose of Buchenwald was to intern Nazis and their collaborators but, unsurprisingly, among them were also people the former Soviet Union regarded as uncooperative and who were interned there through some mistake. Z’s participation in the resistance movement became the cause of his ruin. Following liberation, once he had returned to Weimar after he had been to

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to the jazz funerals and family crypts in New Orleans. For details, see Shiozaki Yoshimitsu 塩崎賢明 et al. (eds), *Lessons from the Great Hanshin Earthquake*, trans. Watanabe Reiko (Hyogo Research Center for Quake Restoration: Creates-Kamogawa, 2005): <[http://www.shinsai.or.jp/hrc-e/publish/lessons\\_ghe/](http://www.shinsai.or.jp/hrc-e/publish/lessons_ghe/)> (accessed 10 November 2009).

Czechoslovakia to search for his younger sister and mother, he was captured by the former Soviet military. When he showed a certificate proving participation in the anti-Nazi resistance movement issued by the American military, he was on the contrary regarded as a spy of the American military side. He was sent to his original concentration camp and spent another four years there. In addition to the cruelty of life in the concentration camp, we can imagine how humiliating were these four years he spent with the Nazis who had held him captive before. Perhaps this is beyond our imagination. In these four years, Nazis and anti-Nazis alike, it is said that the number of people who attained a biological solution by their own hand was between 8,000 and 12,000.

There is one thing I need to draw your attention to. I became acquainted with him at a time when the Wall still existed. At that time he talked about his experience in the Nazi German concentration camp Buchenwald. But he never talked about his experience in the Buchenwald concentration camp of the former Soviet Union. I only learned about his later experience after the Wall had collapsed and East and West Germany had been united.

I received an invitation for the Cultural Exchange Scholarship from the West German government at the time and lived in West Berlin from 1985 to 1987. This was a time when the Wall still existed. I found myself living inside the Wall and my daughter was even born inside the Wall.

At that time I did not know Z. A variety of both German and Japanese personalities materialised from the citizens' association of the Japanese German Peace Forum, which I created through chatting with Germans and the experience of living surrounded by this Wall. One of them was Z. We set May the eighth as the date for Japanese citizens to come to Germany and August the fifteenth as the date for German citizens to come to Japan. (It is probably unnecessary to explain that May the eighth and August the fifteenth are days that convey the same meaning. It is this meaning itself that expressed the significance of the formation of this citizen connection.)<sup>32</sup> From the

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32. Oda's reference to the two dates links the German and Japanese experiences of the end of the war. The Western Allies celebrated V-E (Victory in Europe) Day on 8 May 1945, which was when the Allies formally celebrated the defeat of Nazi Germany and the end of Adolf Hitler's Third

day the citizens arrived in each other's country they visited various sites and stayed in the homes of citizens. This is the tenth year since we started this citizen exchange in 1987. Also this year in August 1997 nineteen German citizens came, including university teachers, students, labourers, regional government officials, housewives— young and old, men and women. They stayed in citizens' homes and visited various sites in Tokyo, Okayama, Fukuyama, Hiroshima, Kōchi, Muroto and even Okinawa. In the ten years since the formation of this citizen exchange, the German side has experienced the paramount historical event that was the unification of East and West Germany as well as the collapse of the Wall. In between these events Z materialised before me and disappeared again into the weedy grave before I knew it.

One time, when Z came to Japan through this exchange he stayed at my home. He weighed over 90 kilograms and it appeared that he was unable to handle his brilliantly protruding potbelly inside my small condominium. I understood soon after he arrived that, being my senior, he was an old-fashioned German who had never used chopsticks before he came to my home, unlike the present generation of young Germans who are quite at home with using chopsticks. Once he left a boiled egg on the table because it was still too soft. My spouse and companion in life noticed it straight away and when she pretended to say in the strict Germanic way, 'It needs to be boiled for another minute,' Z surpassed her strictness by plainly stating, 'No, two minutes.' I can not forget the resonance of his strong German pronunciation when he proclaimed 'Noch zwei Minuten', which together with the stern look on his face told much about the truth of

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Reich. In comparison, 15 August 1945 is referred to as V-J (Victory over Japan) Day and signifies the official surrender of Japan on 15 August 1945. In Japan, this day is known as *shūsen kinenbi* 終戦記念日 (Memorial day for the end of the war). The day marks the end to the key tripartite campaigns in Burma, the Sino-Japanese War, the Pacific War with the US, as well as all other military conflicts in Asia. It is commemorated as Liberation Day in nations such as Korea. At noon Japan Standard Time on that day, Emperor Hirohito's announcement of Japan's acceptance of the terms of the Potsdam Declaration was broadcast to the Japanese people via radio. Earlier the same day, the Japanese government advised the Allies of the surrender by sending a cable to US President Harry S. Truman via the Swiss diplomatic mission in Washington. Since Japan was the last Axis Power to surrender and V-J Day followed V-E Day by three months, V-J Day marked the end of World War II.

his world. I got the feeling that this was the thoroughly stern and meticulous German unchanged since olden times.

I went to Buchenwald several days after I visited the weedy grave. I went by train from Berlin to Weimar and after staying for a night, continued by taxi early in the morning to the remains of the concentration camp. For the most part the buildings from those days, including the place for medical experiments, still existed and were open to the public.

There was heavy mist in the morning and the entire concentration camp was covered in it. No matter where and how you walked, a wall of mist obstructed your way. Looking through the building site of the concentration camp, I am certain that I saw the faint silhouette of a forest in the background beyond the wall of fog. Of course, I didn't know at the time that this forest was the dumping ground for corpses in the old Soviet period of the concentration camp.

I only learned of this through a talk with a friend who had returned recently from Berlin to Japan. He was also an acquaintance of Z and had been to Buchenwald only about one month before. After I had visited, it was discovered that this forest was the dumping ground for corpses from the old Soviet period and it was dug up.

My friend showed me the pictures he took. Duralumin poles stood in the middle of the forest (it was a pine forest). The forest was bristling with these poles. 'What are these?' 'They erected them at the places where they discovered corpses'. The corpses were not exhumed. The bodies were left in the soil as they were and poles were erected. It was like the poles were markers. But what were these markers for? While talking to my friend and looking at the pictures it occurred to me that these were graves of Duralumin poles. There was a group of crosses of various shapes and sizes in front of the large number of Duralumin poles. My friend said 'the bereaved families wilfully put them there'. Among them were some who had 'Why?' written on them.

From ancient times the Korean people have had a strong tradition of ancestral belief; the spirits of people who died on a journey or who were disobedient towards their parents and died before their parents would have no place to go and would wander about forever. Among these unlucky human beings the most unfortunate ones were the murdered three thousand soldiers who were forced into battle and

were killed. There are innumerable soldiers and it appears that ‘three thousand soldiers’ is the general term for them but it is also the generic term for the dead who have met unfortunate deaths such as dying abroad, in accidents, prematurely, and it also includes the deaths of soldiers. If no appropriate ceremony for the repose of the soul is carried out for them, then their grudge will bring about disaster, disease and death for the living. This is articulated by the female shamans called *mudang*, who pray and sing about it. People who believe in them shower them with money and welcome the women to their homes.

When I heard the story of his ‘house grave’ from T, I did not know the term three thousand soldiers or its origin. Had I known it, I think it would have helped me make sense of his story. This happened several years ago. Yet the reason why I vividly remember his facial expression together with his story, which was quite full of power amid his gloom when he talked about it, was beyond a doubt because his story of the house grave touched the innermost recesses of my heart. I was touched, or rather the story affected me. Afterwards, I felt somewhat depressed. At the time I was celebrating his birthday in Shinjuku in a noisy bar in Tokyo but the noise of the bar momentarily appeared far off in the distance.

T is the initial for Tomio and even though he could write the romanised version of it, he probably could not even write the katakana for Tomio, his own name, which was clearly Japanese. He could sing a Japanese song, which I will mention later, and speak only two or three words of Japanese (he talked to me entirely in English). To begin with, his face and the colour of his skin was not that of a Japanese. No matter how you looked at it, he had the skin colour and face of a Micronesian from the Marshall Islands in the Central Pacific Ocean. There was nothing strange about T’s name being Japanese. What he told me was that it was only natural that his name should be Japanese because, when he was born, the Marshall Islands were still a part of the South Sea Islands under Japanese rule. Even though the islands were a former trust territory of the League of Nations, they were essentially a part of the territory of the Greater Japanese Empire and T was an inhabitant of one of the islands that was positioned on the eastern perimeter. And he added that at the time ‘the Japanese

were first-grade Japanese nationals, Koreans were second-grade and we were third-grade’.

He was born on Kwajalein Island but he now lives on Ebeye Island. Even though I have written this, without a doubt it has no meaning at all for the majority of the Japanese who were former ‘first-grade Japanese nationals’. Yet with regard to older Kwajalein Island people then I may recall with strong emotions that this was an island where the Imperial Navy chose to die in battle rather than surrender. It was Shōwa 17 and the reason why I am now using and writing the era name Shōwa is because it has a strong sense of reality for me. In this year 17 the American military began its all-out counteroffensive from Guadalcanal. It was at Makin and Tarawa Island where this first took place in Shōwa 18 in the central Pacific and after the total annihilation of the Japanese military on both islands it arrived at last at Kwajalein Island, which was at the eastern extremity of the Greater Japanese Empire. This was the beginning of the battles of *gyokusai* in the Greater Japanese Empire whose territory eventually reached Okinawa.

It was three thousand soldiers comprising a total of 6,000 people, for the most part from the Imperial Navy, that died in battle rather than surrender at Kwajalein Island. But it was also the three thousand soldiers of the Kwajalein Islanders that got mixed up in the *gyokusai* battle and perished. In addition, three thousand soldiers who were Asian civilians brought from various regions in Asia such as the Philippines, Indonesia, Taiwan, and the Korean peninsula as labourers for the construction of the base for the Imperial Navy, also died together with the three thousand soldiers from Japan. Their number probably weren’t included in the figure of 6,000 dead. After the battle had ceased, the American military who had trouble dealing with the enormous number of corpses, dug holes all over the place, threw in the bodies, and made ends meet by simply covering them with soil. This is the story I have heard directly from the surviving inhabitants of Kwajalein Island. But because after the war the American military turned the entire Kwajalein Island into a gigantic base for nuclear missiles, the whole of this island, which is surrounded by the beautiful coral sea of the Central Pacific, has become a nuclear-missile grave for the three thousand soldiers. Even parties of bereaved families with Japanese government involvement who visited various Pacific battle sites and gathered remains have not set foot upon this nuclear-missile

grave of the three thousand soldiers. There is no doubt that beneath the grave of these nuclear missiles three thousand soldiers' bodies remain discarded as they were, because there is nothing to suggest that the Japanese government requested that the government of the United States let them dig under the nuclear-missile base.

Yet it's not only the nuclear-missile grave of the three thousand soldiers that exists in that part of the Central Pacific. There are also other grave sites of three thousand soldiers resulting from the 'ashes of death' of repeated nuclear tests. Bikini Atoll is famous as the place where the United States conducted hydrogen bomb tests on 1 March 1954 in which Kubokawa Aikichi died after being exposed to the descending ashes of death on board the *Lucky Dragon No. 5*. (Kubokawa was not the only victim of this gigantic hydrogen bomb test referred to as Bravo Experiment. Many inhabitants from various islands starting with Rongelap also died.) But after the nuclear experiments on Bikini Atoll ended, the tests were moved to a different location at Enewetak Atoll and the experiments continued for some forty more times. As a result the islands in this vicinity have been polluted with the ashes of death and become uninhabitable. Many residents have become the victims of radiation sickness but Enewetak Atoll, which was actually known previously as Brown Atoll, is also the site where *gyokusai* battles were carried out on various islands. The reason why I still think after such a long time how cruel the military authorities and the Japanese government of the time were, is because at the time there was so much constant news of *gyokusai* that if the *gyokusai* at Brown Atoll had been acknowledged it would have weakened the fighting spirit of the citizens and therefore it was never announced. It appears that the number of deaths from *gyokusai* at Brown Atoll amounted to three thousand. However, these literally three thousand soldiers went to their deaths struggling without any Japanese recognition and without even the playing of *umi yukaba*, which at the time announced the news of a *gyokusai* on the radio. These three thousand soldiers who were forsaken without even the *umi yukaba* melody included, of course, the three thousand soldiers of the inhabitants of the islands as well as the labourers from various regions in Asia. After the battle, the American military dumped their corpses into pits and covered them with soil, but that's not the end of the story. More than forty thermonuclear experiments were repeated

above that soil and as a result the whole area was covered with the ashes of death.

I did not go there because this region had become off limits. However, the danger from these ashes of death was so great that the American military enclosed the surface where they had piled up with what amounts to a concrete cover. That picture, at least, I have seen. The reason I could not look straight at this picture was because I knew that below that gigantic concrete cover lay the corpses of the three thousand soldiers. In terms of what I said before, if this was not the ashes-of-death grave of the three thousand soldiers then it was rather the concrete-covered grave of the three thousand soldiers. Will these three thousand soldiers push up the concrete cover and rise again?

I was not able to go to this site of thermonuclear experiments at Enewetak Atoll and Bikini Atoll in that part of the Central Pacific Ocean, but I have seen both Enewetak Atoll and Bikini Atoll at a distance from above the clouds and have actually been to Kwajalein Island as well as Ebeye Island and made friends with the residents. Among them were several from Ebeye Island who had bravely continued the movement to dismantle the nuclear missile base on Kwajalein Island. It was they who introduced me to T, a member of the same movement.

Including T, they all were originally residents of Kwajalein Island and had been forcibly moved from there to Ebeye Island after the Imperial Navy had begun to build their base. These enforced movements continued on after the war and were further intensified through driving out the whole population of Kwajalein Island to Ebeye Island. This story is just too good to be true because it was the United States of America that enlarged the base of the Imperial Navy and turned the whole island into a nuclear-missile base. Formerly Ebeye had a different name but because Ebeye was the name of the wife of the platoon commander of the American military who occupied it, its name was changed to Ebeye Island. This story is also too good to be true. On this small island, whose name was remembered in connection with the wife of the platoon commander, the inhabitants of other islands were forcibly assembled because either their land was going to be used as a bombing range or a radar base was to be built there. As a result the population of this small island, which was several kilometres long but only 500 metres wide,

increased rapidly. It presented a horrible sight to the extent that it was called the ‘Pacific slum’ where most of about 15,000 people lived in shacks with tin roofs. It’s not all that strange that it had become a slum because the only work available meant taking the one-day return flight to work at the base on Kwajalein Island. Even though the former inhabitants of Kwajalein Island could work there, they were not permitted to live there. The movement of Kwajalein Islanders who had become residents of Ebeye Island to pursue the dismantling of the base had finally started landing on Kwajalein Island, setting up tents and staying there. T was a participant in this action and he came to Tokyo in order to announce this at some international conference in Tokyo.

I do not intend to write any more about these actions of T and his comrades. What I want to write about is the story of how T had contacted me after the conference and how I met him at a noisy bar in Shinjuku. I wrote before that the celebration for his birthday was held there but actually I learned that this day was his birthday only while I was drinking with him there. Well, for that reason the venue in the noisy bar for welcoming the visitor from afar was transformed into an instant birthday party. After a young friend who accompanied me took the lead and sang ‘Happy Birthday’, the guest began to sing the Japanese nursery rhyme ‘Momotarō san, Momotarō san’ probably in order to return the favour. We were so astonished that we all fell silent. He managed to sing this nursery rhyme with perfectly correct Japanese pronunciation even though he couldn’t utter a single phrase in Japanese. He told us that his mother had taught it to him. His mother was not Japanese. After he said that she was a genuine Micronesian, he added slightly sarcastically ‘or perhaps she was a third-grade Japanese citizen.’ After T explained that he remembered it because his mother often sang it to him as a child, he began to talk about his mother. This is not to say he spoke at length about his mother’s personal history but rather about the recent problem arising between them.

The problem was that his mother was opposed to rebuilding the wooden structure of the restaurant he was managing on Ebeye Island with a more durable reinforced-concrete one. The winds are strong on Ebeye Island and wooden structures break easily. That was the reason he wanted to try to change to a building with reinforced concrete. His

mother was stubbornly opposed, saying that there were Japanese graves beneath the present wooden structure. T also managed to say the phrase 'Japanese graves' with accurate Japanese pronunciation. Just when I was about to ask 'What on earth are they?', I remembered that Ebeye Island was a *gyokusai* island. Formerly there was a naval flying-boat base there and after the *gyokusai* battle, holes were dug and as many as 800 of the three thousand soldiers got buried. There was no doubt that the restaurant, which T had begun to manage with his mother after his father's death, was situated on top of one of these holes. His mother's expression 'Japanese graves' expressed this with point-blank accuracy.

Mother insists that some day the Japanese will come to gather the bones of the Japanese graves—that's the Japanese translation of what T said in rapid English. You could tell from his speedy English that he had become very emotional. At that time they will not be able to retrieve these bones if the building above the Japanese grave is made of reinforced concrete. 'Do you understand?' she says.

After T said this he lapsed into silence. I also fell silent. Momentarily, the noise of the bar appeared to come from far off in the distance.

After a while T added 'My home is a grave.' A house grave—the house of the Japanese grave. That's how I understood his words.

After the Great Hanshin Earthquake there are now only graves of rubble at various locations in the disaster area which was transformed into mere fields of debris. In front of a pile of rubble which had been piled up to an appropriate size was placed a jar with flowers in it. Usually it was only something simple like that but there were also some which had candles and incense. There were also some that had wooden tags erected with the name of the victim inscribed but mostly there wasn't even a wooden tag. The dead literally died in obscurity. The disaster area was a region with lots of foreigners. In addition to resident Koreans and Chinese who had settled there in the past, recently many Asians, such as Vietnamese and Chinese, had come to look for work. Because they lived in inadequate and flimsy housing their death toll was high. They also died an obscure death. A voice called out: 'Don't step there. There are three departed souls below.' This was in Nagata—Nagato, where the inadequate fire-fighting equipment meant that even though the fire-engines appeared no water

came out. For that simple reason all buildings in that area burned out and collapsed, making Nagata in Kobe a district where fathers abandoned daughters and sons mothers who were buried alive in the flames. It reminded me of the burned-out ruins of Osaka after the air-raids in the final stages of the war where charred bodies lay at every turn. Even the fire-engine was completely burned out and lay ungracefully about among the discoloured rubble. There was no water then either. What has changed since then? Or more precisely, what hasn't changed? I heard another voice: 'Pray for the departed before you leave, eh.' I stooped and prayed amid the discoloured expanse of rubble just as I did before in the burned-out ruins of Osaka. There was water in the jars but no flowers. I did not bring flowers.

Now that more than two and a half years have passed since the earthquake, the rubble has been cleared and simply become vacant lots. Amid the prefabricated housing set up here and there, the graves of rubble have decreased markedly but you still come across them occasionally. For the most part, remaining there as if abandoned in the shade of the new prefabricated housing, there may occasionally be bunches of flowers wrapped in vinyl that appear to have been left there by somebody several days before. But often the jars are the only indication. There is water in them but flowers are nowhere to be seen.

There were graves of garden stones. That's what I called them spontaneously. They existed quite near my residence in Nishinomiya. I should have known about the spot where the graves were because it was at the back of the well where my family went every day to scoop up water with a bucket shortly after the earthquake. But I was thoughtlessly unaware of that area shortly after the earthquake. I found out about the total destruction of several houses at the rear only after the rubble had already been cleared and the area had become a vacant plot of land. Actually, I only found out about it after the construction of prefabricated houses at the side and back of the vacant lot with the grave of garden stones already begun.

Anyhow, there was just a vacant plot of land. Obvious reminders of the earthquake included only two standing stones which clearly appeared to be former garden stones in the area of what appeared to have been a garden, as well as the wreckage of an unsightly crumpled-up car which remained in the vicinity of what appears to have been a garage. The vacant plot of land is neither narrow nor wide and,

together with the two garden stones and the wreckage of the car, possibly indicated the typical middle-class lifestyle formerly led by the family who was completely annihilated there. We can easily visualise the family lifestyle here with two young children, the mother a full-time housewife and the father an office worker. This lifestyle continued until that time—5:46 am on 17 January 1995—and completely ceased to exist in an instant. The reason I judged this to be a complete annihilation of the family was probably because of the things brought by people from the neighbourhood. There were always children’s toys and flowers placed between the two standing garden stones in the vicinity of where there appeared to have been a garden before. Actually, they weren’t simply placed there. They were offered to the garden stones. The garden stones naturally became a grave. I also began to offer flowers there every now and then. And then I prayed.

I did this for several months. During that time, both at the side and rear, prefabricated houses were completed. In all likelihood, the middle-class lifestyle which had also been led before at the vacant plot, or I should say the family of the garden-stone grave, resumed. The voices of children could be heard again.

I went overseas for several weeks and therefore failed to visit the garden-stone grave. I went to go there as soon as I returned but both the garden stones and the wreckage of the car had neatly disappeared from the vacant lot. Actually, wire netting had been placed around the vacant lot and a real-estate notice board stood there. The company’s telephone number together with a request for visitors to call was written on the notice board. I cried for the first time. My eyes spontaneously filled with tears.

—The End—

#### Special terms

<i>aboji</i>	アボジ
Attu (or Attsudo) Island	アツツ島
<i>binbō ryokō</i>	貧乏旅行
<i>Daigo fukuryū maru</i>	第五福竜丸
<i>daihonei</i>	大本營
Eiji Tsuburaya	円谷 英二
<i>fujutsu</i>	巫術
Gojira	ゴジラ

<i>gyokusai</i>	玉碎
Hanshin-Awaji-daishinsai	阪神・淡路大震災
<i>hōshasei kōkabutsu</i>	放射性降下物
<i>kaijū</i>	怪獣
<i>kibeī nisei</i>	帰米二世
<i>kodokushi</i>	孤独死
Kuboyama Aikichi	久保山愛吉
Man'yōshū	万葉集
<i>miko</i>	巫女
Momotarō-san no uta	桃太郎さんの歌
<i>mudang</i>	巫堂
<i>muen botoke</i>	無縁仏
Nanshi no shisō	難死の思想
Nihonjinron	日本人論
Otomo no Yakamochi	大伴家持
<i>sange</i>	散華
<i>sanzen gunpei</i>	三千軍兵
<i>shi no hai</i>	死の灰
Shindō Kaneto	新藤 兼人
<i>shūsen kinenbi</i>	終戦記念日
<i>tennōsei</i>	天皇制
Uno Jūkichi	宇野重吉
<i>yakeato jidai</i>	焼け跡時代
<i>yakeato sedai</i>	焼け跡世代
Yasukuni Jinja	靖国神社
Yoshida Shigeru	吉田 茂
<i>zenmetsu</i>	全滅
<i>zentai shōsetsu</i>	全体小説

### **Author's Biography**

Oda Makoto (1932–2007) was one of Japan's most prolific social activists. He was born in Osaka and became a national celebrity with the publication in 1961 of *I Will look at Anything*, a personal account of his travels through the United States and Asia. His involvement with the Citizen's League for Peace in Vietnam (*Beheiren*) movement turned him into one of the most recognisable faces of postwar Japan. Throughout his life Oda valued travel as a means to transcend Japan's socio-cultural sphere of influence and as a result he spent several years living abroad. His legacy of social activism is unrivalled in Japanese postwar history. He is survived by his wife Hyun-Soon Hye and his daughter Nara.

### **Translator's Biography**

Roman Rosenbaum received his PhD in Japanese literature at the University of Sydney in Australia, where he conducts research as an Honorary Associate. He specialises in Postwar Japanese Literature and Popular Cultural Studies. He writes extensively on manga and the notion of a Japanese graphic novel. In 2008 he received the Inoue Yasushi Award for best refereed journal article or book chapter on Japanese literature by a researcher based in Australia. He is currently completing a monograph on Oda Makoto.